

Revolutionary Communism in the United States

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On October 15, 1919, a press dispatch from Buffalo, New York, indicated that the primary election returns in that city gave an average of about three hundred votes to the three candidates whose names appeared on the ballot as representatives of the Communist party the protagonist of the soviet form of government in the United States. The total number of votes cast was 54,000, which shows that the Communist vote was insignificant, numerically. Newspapers ridiculed the diminutive radical vote. All phenomena have a genesis, and it is the fact that a Communist ballot was cast rather than the quantitative character of the vote that has significance for the student of political philosophy and action. To those who saw the revolutionary left wing of the old Socialist party organize the Communist party and the Communist Labor party in Chicago during the first week of September, 1919, this initial appearance of the revolutionary Communists in American political life presages important developments. The event was heralded by revolutionists in this country and in Europe as the emergence of a new era in the political and economic life of the United States. The widespread dissemination of ultra-radical propaganda in connection with recent strikes is further evidence of the revolutionary purposes of Communists in America.

Optimistic prophecies are prevalent to the effect that bolshevism will find no fertile soil in the United States, since American workmen are too prosperous to become susceptible to revolutionary political and industrial philosophy. Similar predictions were voiced even on the floor of the Socialist emergency convention and the Communist Labor party convention last September.

Recent developments in American socialism throw a great deal of light on speculations of this nature. As a matter of fact the soviet form of government, with the identical *ad interim* dictatorship that obtains in Russia at the present time, is being openly advocated in the United States by the Communist party and the Communist Labor party. Both of these parties have declared adherence to the Third (Communist) International, which was convened in Moscow by Nicholai Lenin and Leon Trotzky during the early part of 1919. These groups of American communists are self-expressed supporters of Russian bolshevism, and the principles which they have formulated and are expounding vigorously would, if adopted, introduce a communist regime with all of its revolutionary implications.

An analysis of revolutionary American communism will be clearer if we review briefly the present status of American socialism and the developments that have determined this status. American socialism now comprises a moderate right wing, a vacillating center left, and an extremely radical left wing. The three divisions are officially organized into the Socialist party, the Communist Labor party, and the Communist party, respectively. It is impossible to determine accurately the numerical strength of these parties, on account of the fact that the membership of the old Socialist party has not yet settled sufficiently to warrant an official enumeration. The officials of each party, however, have ventured an estimate of the comparative strength of the three groups. Prior to the recent split in its ranks, the Socialist party had a membership of approximately 100,000. Of this number it still claims 55,000, and concedes a membership of 35,000 to the Communist party and 10,000 to the Communist Labor party.¹ The Communist party claims a membership of 60,000 and it estimates that the Socialist party and the Communist Labor party have about 25,000 and 10,000 respectively, which leaves 5000 members unaccounted for.² The estimate made by the Communist Labor party includes 30,000 members

¹ Estimate of Mr. Otto Branstetter, Executive Secretary of the Socialist party, in a letter to the writer, October 14, 1919.

² *The Communist*, September 27, 1919, p. 2.

for itself, and 25,000 for the Communist party, which leaves 45,000 still in the ranks of the Socialist party.³ It is highly probable that with the lapse of several months an official census will find about 46,000 persons in the ranks of the Socialist party, 40,000 in the Communist party, and 14,000 in the Communist Labor party, unless a merger between the last two parties is effected in the meantime, which would throw a majority of American Socialists to the surviving left wing party.

There is not space here to review in detail the causes that have produced the schism in American socialism.⁴ A brief summary of these conditions, however, is necessary to a proper understanding of the differences that obtain between the three parties. Generally speaking, the disintegration and the reconstruction in the structure of American socialism are due to the refusal of the right wing faction to abandon its program of opportunism for the ultra-revolutionary platform leading to the establishment of a proletarian dictatorship which was demanded by the left wing of the old Socialist party. This irreparable breach in American socialism is the logical sequence of a similar crisis, disruption, and reconstruction in European socialism, in which the moderates still adhere to the Second International while the revolutionists accept the leadership of Lenin and Trotzky within the Third (Moscow) International.

Like its European contemporaries American socialism even before the world war was experiencing unprecedented disaffection among its adherents, and this discontent has gained momentum during the subsequent years. Naturally enough, the foreign-language federations of the old Socialist party were most largely responsible for the development of dissatisfaction with the party's program of opportunism. Pronounced revolutionary tendencies at the St. Louis Convention of the Socialist party in April, 1917, forced the adoption of a militant declaration against the war, and led to the arrest of the party's leaders. Increasing impatience on the part of the revolutionary membership and

³ *The Communist Labor Party News*, September, 1919, p. 1.

⁴ See an article by the writer on "The Present Status of Socialism in the United States," *Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 124, No. 6 (December, 1919), pp. 821-830.

its enthusiasm for the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia led to the organization of a Communist Propaganda League in Chicago, on November 7, 1918. There soon followed general agitation for the adoption of a revolutionary Communist program of action, emphasizing the necessity of a radical reconstruction in the thought and practices of American socialism. The left wing section of the Socialist party was organized in New York City early in 1919; and immediately the Lettish, Russian, Lithuanian, Polish, Ukrainian, South Slavic, Hungarian, and Esthonian federations of the Socialist party, representing about 25,000 members, declared their adherence to the program of the left wing faction. Thus far no general movement for secession from the Socialist party had appeared; but the opposition had developed remarkable strength, electing 12 out of 15 members of the national executive committee at the party election. The election, however, was declared fraudulent by the old national executive committee, and the latter decided to remain in office until the emergency convention, called for August 30, 1919, although its term of office should have expired on June 30.⁵ This action of the committee, together with its suspension of the foreign language federations, stimulated the opposition of the left wing.

Local Boston, Local Cleveland, and the left wing section of the Socialist party of New York City issued a call for a national left wing conference, which convened in New York City on June 21, 1919. Ninety-four delegates representing twenty states, and chosen especially from large industrial centers, "the heart of the militant proletarian movement," attended this assembly. At the outset of this conference there developed a difference of opinion on the alternatives of organizing immediately a new party devoted to the revolutionary class struggle or of continuing the fight for control of the old Socialist party, at least until the emergency convention. The proposal to organize at once a new party was defeated by a vote of 55 to 38, whereupon 31 delegates, representing for the most part the Russian federations,

⁵ Report of Louis C. Fraina, international secretary of the Communist party of America, to the executive Committee of the Communist International. *The Communist*, October 11, 1919.

decided to withdraw. Later this minority of thirty-one issued a call for a convention to open in Chicago on September 1, for the purpose of organizing the new party, thus repudiating all participation in the Socialist emergency convention. The majority delegates at the left wing conference adopted a program to gain control of the old party, and to assure the success of this program a national left wing council was elected to combat the reactionary right wing faction.

By August 1, the national left wing council was convinced that the majority of the membership represented at the left wing conference had repudiated the action of the majority delegates and had indorsed the proposal for the organization of a new party. Consequently, the left wing council joined the organizing committee, elected by the minority delegates, in issuing a call for a convention to organize a Communist party. Out of this convention, held in Chicago during the first week of September, 1919, emerged the Communist party of America, with the dual purpose of waging war against reactionary socialism and against capitalism. Meanwhile, the left wing executive committee of the Socialist party, elected by the revolutionary faction, was denied recognition and office by the old national executive committee. The left wing forces, however, continued their struggle for party control, and carried hostilities to the floor of the emergency convention. There the superior parliamentary tactics of the right wing leaders spelled defeat for the revolutionists, whereupon the latter, led by John Reed, John Carney, and William Bross Lloyd, convoked a separate convention in the I. W. W. hall and organized, on August 31, the Communist Labor party of America.

The emergency convention of the Socialist party did not indorse the Communist International, but submitted the question of indorsement to the membership through referendum, while both of the Communist conventions accepted without qualification the pronouncements of the Communist International and formulated their programs and platforms with Russian bolshevism as the major inspiration. It should be noted here that although the Communists in the United States are divided into two distinct parties and present center left and extreme left factions,

there is a probability that a process of amalgamation will take place sooner or later, which will leave American socialism with but two major parties—the Socialist party on the right and the Communist party on the left. If this consolidation does take place the Communist Labor party, being the weaker of the communist groups, will doubtless become extinct. Thus far extensive negotiations seeking a merger of these two Communist parties have failed on account of the unwillingness of both to effect a compromise on the question of party control and the absence of an acceptable basis of fusion. The rank and file—the unknown quantity in the present reconstruction of American socialism—may soon accomplish what the officials of the two parties have failed to do.

This survey of the conditions that have necessitated a reconstruction in American socialism suggests that there is a fundamental basis of disagreement between the Socialists and the Communists. This fundamental difference is that the Socialists, represented in the Socialist party, accept parliamentary action as an effective and desirable means of overthrowing capitalism and introducing the socialist state; while the Communists, represented in the two Communist parties, oppose parliamentary participation except for purposes of propaganda, and advocate the revolutionary extermination of capitalism as the initial step in establishing a dictatorship of the proletariat, preceding the organization of the communist society. The program of the Socialist party, therefore, is moderate and opportunistic, while the program of the revolutionary Communist parties is ultra-radical, deprecating all compromise with existing political and economic institutions and rejecting parliamentary reform as a means of revolutionizing the social order. Between moderate socialism and revolutionary communism there is no basis for compromise and cooperation.⁶ Revisionist and reformist socialism organized within the Second International is condemned as counter-revolutionary in philosophy and action, a betrayer of proletarian interests and the prophet of reactionary state capitalism. State

⁶ *The Communist*, September 27, 1919, pp. 1, 6; *The Communist Labor Party News*, September, 1919, p. 1.

capitalism, precisely that type of state capitalism advocated by moderate socialism, is viewed by the Communists as the highest expression of imperialism and as designed to buttress capitalism in further exploitation of the proletariat. Germany is the Communists' example *par excellence* of what might be expected under state capitalism. Moderate socialism proffers a capitalist parliamentary republic and not a proletarian dictatorship.⁷ Revolutionary communism and reformist socialism, therefore, hold different conceptions of the state; the former adheres to the theory that there must be a revolutionary demolition of the capitalist state and organization of a new state under proletarian domination; the latter accepts the bourgeois parliamentary state as the basis for the evolutionary transition from capitalism to socialism.

American communism, like Russian bolshevism, its major inspiration, is an attempt to return to pure Marxism and to obliterate every vestige of pseudo-Marxism represented in opportunistic socialism. In speaking with the leaders and the rank and file of American Communists one is impressed with their strong desire to return to the first principles of communism as enunciated in the manifesto of 1848; and communist literature is replete with orthodox interpretations of the revolutionary class struggle, the materialistic conception of history, the theory of surplus value, and the law of the concentration of capital. Moderate socialism both in Europe and in America have wandered far afield from these fundamental articles of communist faith; and American communists, accepting the challenge of what they believe to be the new era of proletarian dictatorship, are organizing their forces after the manner of their Russian comrades with a view to reconstructing the whole socialist movement on the basis of unadulterated Marxism. One need but examine the manifestoes and programs of the Communist parties to grasp the significance and determination of this purpose.

The program of revolutionary communism in the United States may be summarized briefly as follows: (1) complete disruption

⁷ Manifesto of the Communist Party, *The Communist*, September, 1919, pp. 6-8.

of the capitalist state and the elimination of every vestige of bourgeois parliaments; (2) organization of a dictatorship of the proletariat as the initial step in the communist reconstruction of the social order, subsequent to the anticipated successful social revolution; (3) participation in political campaigns under capitalism to be of secondary importance, devoted only to the task of disseminating communist propaganda against the bourgeois state; (4) nominations for public office and participation in elections to be limited to legislative bodies, as municipal councils, state legislatures, and Congress; (5) representatives of American communism in these assemblies not to introduce or support political and social reform measures, but to use their parliamentary powers and privileges in exposing capitalistic oppression of the proletariat; (6) absolute maintenance of the revolutionary class struggle and no compromise or cooperation with political groups not committed definitely and openly to that struggle, as the Socialist party, Labor parties, the Non-Partisan League, and municipal ownership leagues; (7) major activities of the Communist parties to be carried on in the industrial struggles in order to develop a general understanding of the strike in relation to the final overthrow of capitalism, that is, to emphasize the revolutionary implications of the mass strike rather than the immediate purposes of the local walkout; (8) trade-unions to be revolutionized and industrial unionism to be advocated as against the reactionary craft unionism of the American Federation of Labor; (9) coöperation with the revolutionary proletariat of the world to be encouraged, in order to guarantee the success of the Communist International and pave the way for the introduction of world communism comprised of free, coordinated, cooperating communist societies.⁸

The program of revolutionary communism in the United States is similar to the program of Russian bolshevism, namely, complete disruption of the capitalist state, oppression and expropriation of the bourgeoisie, the organization of a proletarian dicta-

⁸ The Program of the Communist Party, *The Communist*, September 27, 1919, p. 9; The Program and Platform of the Communist Labor Party, *The Communist Labor Party News*, September, 1919, p. 2.

torship and, eventually, the reconstruction of the social order upon a communistic basis. The immediate objective of the Communist attack is the political and economic foundations of the present society. In the Communist program there is no provision for a temporizing compromise with the institutions that constitute the major defenses of capitalism, such as private property, the wage system, the courts, and the parliamentary structure. There is to be no gradual growing into socialism. Evolutionary development has no place in communist parlance; revolutionary extirpation of all those institutions the continued existence of which might facilitate counter-revolutionary movements is the strategy *par excellence* of communism. "The immediate objective of the proletarian revolution is the conquest of the power of the state; and this means the annihilation of the bourgeois state, its parliamentary system and bourgeois democracy, and the introduction of a new 'state' comprised in the dictatorship of the proletariat," states the international secretary of the Communist party of America.⁹

The proletarian struggle, then, is essentially a political struggle. It is political in the sense that its objective is political—the annihilation of all parliamentary defenses of capitalist power, and the substitution therefor of a proletarian commonwealth. It cannot be emphasized too strongly that communism does not propose to "capture" the bourgeois parliamentary machinery, as does moderate socialism, but rather to conquer and destroy it completely, for "As long as the bourgeois state prevails, the capitalist class can baffle the will of the proletariat."¹⁰ This immediate aim of American communism is identical with that executed by Lenin and Trotzky in the Bolshevik Revolution, and is believed to be a tactical necessity in disposing of the old social structure and defending the communist order in its germinal period.

For the realization of their immediate purposes the Communists have outlined a specific program of action. There is to be,

⁹ Fraina, Louis C. *Revolutionary Socialism—A Study in Socialist Reconstruction*, p. 213.

¹⁰ Manifesto of the Communist Party, *The Communist*, September 27, 1919, p. 7.

first, the development of a general political strike in which elections will be boycotted, as they were in Russia by the Bolsheviks in the elections for the Second Duma in 1906, and, second, the germination of mass action through the general strike. The method of the Communist attack, therefore, is to be both economic and political. The nature of the political boycott is not at all clear from statements issued by the Communist parties. From the expressions on the convention floor it seems that the political strike is to consist in nonparticipation in elections, which is to serve the purpose of a silent proletarian taboo of the parliamentary regime of capitalism and to emphasize the irreconcilability and incompatibility of bourgeois and proletarian interests. The pronouncements of the Communist groups—the manifestoes, platforms, and constitutions—do not contain provision for such a boycott of elections and do not, moreover, preclude election to public office.

Although the Communists emphasize the fact that not one of the great teachers of scientific socialism has taught the possibility of social revolution through the use of the ballot, they do not ignore entirely the value of voting, or the election of revolutionists to public office, provided these achieve beneficial results for the workers in their great economic struggle. Cognizance is taken of the fact that political campaigns and the election of party representatives to seats in parliamentary bodies provide opportunities for exposing capitalist democracy, educating the workers to a realization of their class interests, and demonstrating the necessity of overthrowing the existing régime. The Communist parties entertain no hope of achieving their purposes at the polls, and warn their adherents against placing confidence in legislative reforms under capitalism.

There is nothing in the program of the Communist Labor party that would prohibit its parliamentary representatives from introducing and supporting legislative measures in the interest of the workers, and on the whole the party appears not adverse to reformative statutes of any character, provided these advance the proletarian conquest of the state.¹¹ The Communist party is

¹¹ Program of the Communist Labor Party, *The Communist Labor Party News*, October, 1919, p. 2.

less vacillating and opportunistic, for its program provides that (1) participation in parliamentary campaigns is of secondary importance, to be used only for the purpose of revolutionary propaganda; (2) parliamentary representatives of the party shall not introduce or support reform measures; (3) Communist representatives shall use the parliamentary forum to interpret and emphasize the revolutionary implications of the class struggle, to expose the oppressive class character of the capitalist state, and to show that parliamentarism and bourgeois democracy deceive the workers with reform palliatives.¹² In order to concentrate its political activity and to prevent degeneration of parliamentary action into reformism, the Communist party limits nominations for public office to legislative bodies, including municipal councils, state legislatures, and the national Congress. For the same reasons the party prohibits coöperation with organizations not committed to the revolutionary class struggle.¹³ A similar position in regard to such coöperation is taken by the Communist Labor party.¹⁴

In relegating legislative reforms to a position of minor importance or completely ignoring such measures, American communism differs from other reform movements, including moderate socialism. For this reason its program is not likely to prove attractive to practically minded American workmen. From parliamentarism the Communist turns to mass action as the most effective means of expediting the social revolution, which he declares to be inevitable. If the immediate aim of communism is political in character, its method of achievement is both political and economic. Politico-economic mass action is the *sine qua non* of the social revolution. According to the Communist analysis of historical developments, isolated economic action in the form of craft unions and sporadic strikes, and parliamentary action in the bourgeois assemblies, have proved futile when viewed from the standpoint of the revolutionary class struggle. The new phase into which the class struggle is just entering necessitates

¹² The Program of the Communist Party, *The Communist*, September 27, 1919, p. 9.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *The Communist Labor Party News*, October, 1919, p. 2.

the unification of industrial and political action as a determinant of successful proletarian conquest of political power.¹⁵ As a matter of fact, however, the mass action of American communism is more industrial than political in character.

For the propagation of mass action through the general strike revolutionary communism has a definite policy. Since the ultimate aim of communism is the organization of a workers' industrial republic, the logical channel of approach is through the united action of the industrial and agricultural proletariat. Consequently; communism is conveying to these workers the message effectively enunciated by Marx and Lenin, namely, that capitalism expropriates the proletariat, the difference between wages and product constituting the unearned profits of the capitalists. This surplus value attributed to the efforts of labor must, therefore, become the property of the workers. The differential of production can be regained through mass action in seizing the machinery of industry and appropriating it for the workers. To attain this end the industrial strike must cease to be isolated and passive and become positive, general, and aggressive, preparing the workers for the assumption of industrial administration.

The mass strike is possible only under a synthetic organization of the workers in the basic industries. Recognition of this fact has led revolutionary communism to denounce conservative craft unionism represented in the American Federation of Labor, which it characterizes as a shackle upon the militant movement of the American proletariat, because of its tendency to divide the workers into disintegrated fragments under a reactionary bureaucracy. To the Communist the most vital and promising fact in American trade-unionism is the attempt of the membership to break the rule of conservative officials, and to develop a type of industrial unionism that will respond sympathetically and spontaneously to the revolutionary impulse of the workers. If the Communists' analysis is correct, disintegrated craft unionism is destined to be superseded by industrial unionism, just as moder-

¹⁵ Fraina, *op. cit.*, pp. 178, 179.

ate socialism is giving place to revolutionary communism. Thus unionism will become an agency for militant action in the aggressive struggle of the proletariat against capitalism, and industrial union organization, divorced from the methods and policies of autonomous craft unions and "inspired with the revolutionary purpose, becomes a vital factor in the proletarian revolution."¹⁶

Industrial unionism develops its real power among the unskilled workers who, untrammelled by obstructions of craft differentiation and stratification and welded into a common mold by machine industry, possess a clear conception of group interests and cultivate the *esprit de corps* of the industrial proletariat. It is this industrial "consciousness of kind," this vigorous sense of common interests, that makes industrial unionism, structurally and functionally, the peculiar unionism of the unskilled workers. American communism has ingeniously sensed this peculiar psychology of the untrained mass.¹⁷ The Communists, however, find limitations even in industrial unionism, on account of the impossibility of organizing the whole working class into industrial unions under the capitalistic regime, and they contend that to achieve the social revolution it will be necessary to enlist the workers, organized and unorganized, by means of revolutionary mass action.¹⁸ Nevertheless, industrial union organization is to be effected whenever and wherever possible, and the general strike is to be generated; for as strikes become general they "acquire political significance, action becomes the action of the mass, the integrated action of an integrated proletariat."¹⁹

To marshal the forces of the militant masses, American communism has determined to function through local and district units of the two parties assigned to the task of establishing intimate contact with the workers in the mills, workshops, and mines. It is the business of these party units to initiate and support

¹⁶ *The Communist*, September 27, 1919, p. 2.

¹⁷ Cf. *The Programs, Platforms, and Manifestoes of the Communist Parties, and Revolutionary Socialism—A Study in Socialist Reconstruction*, by Louis C. Fraina.

¹⁸ Manifesto, Program, Constitution, etc., of the Communist Party, 1919, p. 12.

¹⁹ Fraina, op. cit., p. 187.

plans for the organization of labor along the lines of the shop steward and shop committee movement in England. Moreover, Communist propagandists are to encourage the organization of these shop committees into industrial councils, district councils, and a central council of all industries, as proposed under the Whitley Plan.²⁰ These committees and councils afford an effective medium for the dissemination of Communist doctrines, and suggest the practicability of the administration of industry by the workers. Paradoxical as it may seem, many employers, both in Europe and in the United States, have inaugurated similar schemes of shop committees and industrial councils with the hope of satisfying the workers' demand for industrial democracy and preventing the spread of Communist philosophy. There is little doubt, also, that industrial councils have been introduced to "break the back of trade-unionism," precisely what the revolutionary Communist hopes will be achieved.

The organization of a general type of industrial unionism embracing the Industrial Workers of the World, the Workers' International Industrial Union, independent and secession unions, militant unions of the American Federation of Labor, and the unorganized workers, becomes the major task of American communism for two reasons. First, because this type of proletarian organization makes possible the mass strike, with its revolutionary implications, constantly suggesting the feasibility of the conquest of capitalistic political power;²¹ and, second, because industrial unionism, organizing the workers by industries, becomes potentially, if not actually, the fundamental basis of the new communist society, together with other administrative agencies necessary to correlate the nonindustrial functions of the new régime.²² "After the conquest of power the industrial unions may become the starting point of the communist reconstruction of society."²³

²⁰ Special Report on Labor Organization, *The Communist Labor Party News*, October, 1919, p. 2; The Program of the Communist Party, *The Communist*, September 27, 1919, p. 9.

²¹ Manifesto of the Communist Party, *The Communist*, September 27, 1919, p. 8.

²² Cf. Fraina, op. cit., p. 220.

²³ Manifesto of the Communist Party, *The Communist*, September 27, 1919, p. 8.

The social revolution, which communism predicts will come through mass action generated in the industries, and which is to assume political character and significance, will introduce the dictatorship of the proletariat as it did in Russia. American Communists entertain no hope of immediate revolution; it may be a decade away, but it is inevitable. Their present task, therefore, is to prepare the workers for the administration of the state and industry during the approaching cataclysm, which will come at a moment of utter collapse of the old structure of society. Communism teaches no obedience to the blind fatalism of what it terms pseudo-Marxism, but purposive and conscious action in the interest of proletarian triumph. The creation of mass action is all important in the immediate policies of communism. "Under the impulse of the crisis, the proletariat acts for the conquest of power, by means of mass action. Mass action concentrates and mobilizes the forces of the proletariat, organized and unorganized; it acts equally against the bourgeois state and the conservative organizations of the working class."²⁴ To the communist philosopher the vital facts of industrial evolution are the concentration of the machinery of production in the hands of a few, the increasing tendency toward combinations and trusts, and the leveling down of all workers to the ranks of the unskilled. To these facts the unskilled proletariat—the hope of communism—is expected to respond through mass action for the appropriation of political power and the organization of the proletarian dictatorship.

The dictatorship of the proletariat is a recognition of the fact that in the communist reconstruction of society the proletariat alone counts as a class.²⁵ This dictatorship, however, is designed not only to perform the negative task of crushing the old order of capitalism, but also the work of constructing a new society which is to function not in the government of persons but in the management of production and distribution. The proletarian dictatorship is viewed by the Communist as a necessary but temporary expedient in effecting the transition from capitalism to

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

communism. Out of the disorder and chaos of the disrupted capitalist regime the revolutionists believe there will arise the complete structure of a new social order of communist socialism—industrial self-government of the communistically organized producers. When this structure is perfected, which implies absolute economic and political expropriation of the bourgeoisie, the dictatorship is to end. To understand the Communists' justification of this ruthless *ad interim* dictatorship one must recall that to them the state is a symbol of intimidation and coercion, functioning always in the interest of the ruling class. Thus, with the conquest of political power by the workers who become the dominant authority, political rights and recognition are denied the bourgeois class.²⁶ During the transition from capitalism to communism, therefore, democratic government as it is generally interpreted cannot obtain; rather must there be a proletarian autocracy.

All this prompts the query: who constitutes the proletarian class? The term proletariat as used by the Communists refers to that class of persons which is dependent for its livelihood upon selling its labor power to the owners of industry.²⁷ The professional and skilled classes receive little consideration, and are very likely classified with the *petite bourgeoisie*. It is the unskilled who are the real proletariat in Communist terminology, for the skilled and professional groups think in terms of their craft, of individuals and their property, while the unskilled—the standardized product of modern industry—think in terms of the mass. "The Social Revolution can be carried through only by the industrial proletariat of unskilled labor, in spite of and acting against all the ideas and activity of *all other social groups*."²⁸ And again, "The machine proletariat of average unskilled labor constitutes the typical proletariat in the Marxian sense," and "constitutes the material basis of Socialism."²⁹ Marx and Engels, it will be recalled,

²⁶ Fraina, *op. cit.*, pp. 214, 217.

²⁷ Mr. C. E. Ruthenberg, Executive Secretary of the Communist Party, in a letter to the writer, November 20, 1919.

²⁸ Fraina, *op. cit.*, p. 137. The italics are ours.

²⁹ Fraina, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

thought of the proletariat as the class of modern wage-laborers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labor-power in order to live.³⁰ As the American Communists interpret the term "wage-laborers," it applies evidently only to the unskilled in industries and agriculture.

Beyond the period of the proletarian dictatorship the program of American communism does not provide a definite form of social structure. Not an outline of the future society, but a program of action is the present purpose of communism. To attempt to describe the structural and functional aspects of the new social order, other than those indicated in the form of organization created to wage the class struggle, would be utopian, say the Communists. It is expected that the framework of the new society will be made during the transition, under the surveillance of the ruling proletarians. The norms of the communist order will evolve in this period. At first industrial administration will function through general organizations known as councils of workers. These administrative units are to be integrated and adapted to industrial divisions. It is at this juncture that industrial unionism is to function, becoming the basis of the new communist society, together with such other administrative agencies as may prove necessary to coördinate the nonindustrial activities of the people. "Each industry will constitute a department of the industrial state; the workers in each industry will organize in local councils and these unite into general industrial councils coördinated with other general industrial councils into a central administration of the whole productive process."³¹ The function of the central administration is to be directive, not repressive; positive, not negative, coordinating and guiding the machinery of production and distribution. The distribution of the product is to be determined ultimately on a purely communistic basis: *from each individual according to his ability, to each according to his needs.*³²

³⁰ *The Communist Manifesto*, translation by Mr. Samuel Moore, p. 12.

³¹ Fraina, op. cit., p. 220.

³² Cf. *Ibid.*

This is identical with the program of Russian bolshevism. The Bolsheviks, it will be remembered, have two general forms of organization: the All-Russian Council of soviets with its executive committee and people's commissars, and the Supreme Council or commissariat of public economy. The functions of the former are political in their character, constituting the political government of Bolshevik Russia during the period of reconstruction. Police powers to preserve order within, control of the army and navy to protect the soviet republic from external and internal enemies, administration of the foreign affairs of the commune, and the adjudication of appeals in industrial matters, are some of the functions performed by the soviet administrative units, coordinated in the All-Russian Council. With the defeat of the enemies of the commune and the completion of the socializing process this political machinery will cease to function. The Supreme Council of Public Economy administers the industrial affairs, such as determination of wages, apportionment of output, distribution of rations, insurance and relief of workers, technical education, and recreation.

As in Russia, the proletarian dictatorship devised by American communism is to be a temporary makeshift created to dispose of counter-revolutionary movements. As the political machinery of the *ad interim* period completes its work, that is, when the opposition of the bourgeoisie is broken, the dictatorship of the proletariat will disappear and with it the political state and all its class distinctions. The basis of the communist society will be industrial, not territorial, and its constituents, therefore, will be the organized producers. The other elements of the population—the *petite bourgeoisie*—will participate and function in this new proletarian order only as they are absorbed into the industrial structure and become useful producers.³³ The communist society, it is contended, will be undemocratic only to those who are not proletarians. Within the communist structure itself all are to become proletarians and productive labor will be the basis of franchise.

³³ Fraina, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

The philosophy and program of American communism invites adverse criticism at several points. First, its disregard of parliamentary action and its opposition to legislative reforms are unfounded denials of the efficacy of the ballot in improving the status of the workers and other classes in society. It is conceded that social reform has failed to usher in a proletarian millennium, but this does not constitute proof of the futility of legislative reforms. The history of social legislation is replete with splendid achievements of parliamentary action in behalf of the workers. Communism's rejection of pragmatic opportunism seems unwise in a country like the United States, where with effective political organization much can be done to defend the interests of the so-called proletariat.

In the second place, the egalitarian philosophy, out of which springs the dictum "from each person according to his ability, and to each according to his needs," has never been generally accepted as practicable, and its adoption in this country is very unlikely. A system of "distributive justice" that is based upon needs rather than upon contributive effort is to many persons not justice at all, but expropriation of the industrious and efficient for the benefit of the inefficient and indolent. Such a system of distribution would very likely destroy the initiative and enterprise that have constituted the potent forces in social progress.

Third, it is difficult to justify, even as a temporary expedient, the autocratic proletarian dictatorship by a revolutionary minority who, during the transition from capitalism to communism, are to deny all rights and privileges to the other classes of society and permanently expropriate them. The refusal to permit the organization of a constituent assembly to determine the structural and functional aspects of the new society is the antithesis of the Anglo-Saxon concept of democracy.

Finally, the abolition of the political state seems a presumption in favor of anarchism. To abolish parliamentary government of persons and establish in its stead a management of industrial processes presumes that the production and distribution of wealth are entirely divorcible from persons as producers and distribu-

tors. Unless the human factor in these processes can be standardized to react altruistically, authority must be delegated to some person or body of persons to compel obedience, or else order will be replaced by chaos and anarchy. Anarchism is the negation of all authority, whether political, economic, or religious; communism accepts unlimited state power and authority during the transition from capitalism to communism, beyond which all government of persons is to cease.³⁴ If in their future society the Communists propose to continue the industrial councils of the transition period, it is difficult to see how there can be government of things apart from government of persons. Moreover, should the Communists, during their reconstruction of society, find that the continuation of political councils like the soviets is a prerequisite to order and progress, it is highly probable that these councils would be no more democratic and truly representative of the entire population than political caucuses and legislative committees have been under the present system. Delegated authority, under communism, which would seem imperative for the maintenance of order, would doubtless be open to the same danger of abuses of power as now obtains under their arch enemy—"Capitalistic Parliamentarism."

Despite the destructive character of its program, the uncertainty and vagueness of its plans for the future social order, and the unsoundness of many of its doctrines, American communism is gaining a large following among the industrial workers and promises to become an important influence in our political and economic life. For these reasons it commands the thoughtful consideration of every student of political and economic philosophy.

³⁴ Cf. "The Russian Revolution," by N. Lenin, *The New International*, June 30, 1917, and *Revolutionary Socialism—A Study in Socialist Reconstruction*, by Louis C. Fraina.